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ABSTRACT

Project aims were to learn what college freshmen knew of the late 19th and 20th century presidents and to determine the students' writing level. During the first class of each of five semesters, students enrolled in an American History Since 1865 course were asked to write one paragraph about any president in the time period 1865-1981. Due to time constraints, the report contains summaries of student evaluations of four presidents only: Richard M. Nixon (the most written about president in the study); John F. Kennedy (ranked second in student selection); Harry S. Truman (included to achieve political balance--two Democrats and two Republicans); and Theodore Roosevelt (included because he is not in the students' immediate historical tradition). Students believe that Nixon's foreign policy achievements will ultimately overshadow his participation in Watergate and that historians will finally judge him as a great president. Kennedy is viewed as a hero and an outstanding leader. Truman is known for his honesty and decision making. Roosevelt is viewed as a forceful leader in foreign and domestic affairs. If the papers were graded on the quality of written English, as a whole they would receive a grade of C- to D+. (RM)

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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF POST CIVIL WAR PRESIDENTS, 1865-1981

Session Title: High School Competency in American History and English

Session No. 35: Saturday, March 10, 1984, 9:00-10:50 a.m.
Suite D/E, Regency West Hotel, Omaha, Nebraska

Presented at the: 27th Annual MISSOURI VALLEY HISTORY CONFERENCE

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This project developed from an in class exercise to assist Professor St John in lecture and class preparation. Its aim was twofold: first, to determine the writing level of the freshman American history survey students and their common historical fund of knowledge relating to presidents since 1865, and second, to identify those students poorly prepared in language skills and historical writing. Students deficient in writing skills were referred to the Learning Resource Center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO); they were also advised by the instructor that they would have to make a special effort to keep up-to-date and to secure assistance from the teaching assistant in note-taking and test preparation.

Probably the most potent motivator for the authors in writing this paper was curiosity. Rather than waiting 25, 50 or even 100 years to learn what historians believed and wrote concerning the modern presidents (1865 to 1981) we believed that it would be interesting to learn what college freshmen knew or believed they knew of the late nineteenth and twentieth century presidents.

HOW THE DATA WAS COLLECTED

During the first class of each of the five semesters from the fall of 1979 through the fall of 1981, Professor St. John asked each student in the course American History Since 1865 to write one paragraph about any president in the time period 1865-1981. In her directions she indicated that the students could choose their favorite president, the president that they felt was the best or the worst leader, or the

president they knew the most about. American History Since 1865 is a one semester, freshman level survey.

Of the 386 respondents, seven students did not follow the directions and either did not write a paragraph about one president or did not select a president in the correct time period.

In the material which we have given to you, we have included a chart indicating how many students selected each president. Due to the time constraints of the presentation we will focus on the following four presidents: Richard M. Nixon, John F. Kennedy, Harry S. Truman and Theodore Roosevelt.

Nixon was chosen by 104 of the 379 respondents which makes him the most written about president in our study. John Kennedy was chosen by 52 of the 379 students and ranked second in student selection. We chose Truman in order to achieve political (two Democrats and two Republicans) and numerical balance. We choose Theodore Roosevelt because he is not in the students' immediate historical and oral tradition.

We developed categories to classify the statements students made concerning the presidents. (Refer to Appendix for examples of forms developed by the authors.) The categories and their descriptions are as follows:

#1 Background/Biography

In this category we included any reference the student made to the president's family, his experience prior to or following his presidency, his education, his political party, his campaign(s) for public office, his personal life, events leading up to his election, and the way

STUDENTS WHO SELECTED EACH PRESIDENT BY SEMESTER*

	Fall 1979	Spring 1980	Fall 1980	Spring 1981	Fall 1981	Total
Lincoln, Abraham	3	1	5	5	6	19
Jackson, Andrew	0	1	0	0	1	2
Grant, Ulysses	1	2	0	0	1	4
Hayes, Rutherford	0	0	1	0	0	1
Roosevelt, Theodore	4	2	3	3	4	16
Wilson, Woodrow	0	0	2	1	0	3
Harding, Warren	0	1	0	0	1	2
Coolidge, Calvin	0	0	0	0	1	1
Roosevelt, Franklin	7	5	16	6	5	39
Truman, Harry	5	3	4	2	6	20
Eisenhower, Dwight	1	1	4	0	0	6
Kennedy, John	13	4	12	9	14	52
Johnson, Lyndon	5	1	2	0	0	8
Nixon, Richard	27	9	18	18	32	104
Ford, Gerald	7	5	3	7	8	30
Carter, Jimmy	1	9	8	13	19	50
Reagan, Ronald	0	0	0	0	22	22
Total students/papers						379

*Seven students did not follow the directions and wrote either on a president who was in office before 1865 or wrote on more than one president. The authors disregarded these papers in analyzing student responses.

he left office (i.e. losing to another candidate, death in office, assassination or resignation).

#2 Integrity

Integrity was a difficult quality to define, although it was obvious that the students made value judgments about the character of the president they chose. Since students could choose the best or the worst president there were both positive and negative statements about the integrity of the president. To qualify for inclusion in this category the student had to make a statement about the president's honesty as a leader or as a person, his sincerity, his moral character, or his intent to do the "right thing."

#3 Leadership

Student perceptions were of the best or the worst president; or the most memorable. Thus, there were two subsections emphasizing positive and negative characteristics of presidential decision-making. To qualify for inclusion in this category, the student had to make a statement regarding the quality of the president's guidance or direction of the American government and/or nation.

#4 Intelligence

Although a most abstract attribute, student comments relative to a president's knowledgeability, comprehension, understanding and critical thinking were included in this category. It was interpreted broadly to include common sense, problem-solving ability, creative/innovative and effective thinking.

#5A Policies/Accomplishments: Domestic

We included in this category any references the students made to

legislation, acts, domestic policies and/or achievements during the president's term of office.

In evaluating papers concerning Richard Nixon we divided this category into two parts: statements concerning the Watergate scandal and statements concerning domestic achievements or policies that were not related to Watergate.

#5B Policies/Accomplishments: Foreign

We included in this category any references the students made to external policies, diplomacy, acts and/or proposals relative to foreign countries, wars, and world affairs during the president's term of office.

#6 Courage

We included in this category references the students made to the president's strength of conviction, his bravery, or his ability to face tough decisions with courage.

There was some overlapping between this category and that of leadership.

#7 Public Image

This is a most ambiguous term to define, and one that applies primarily to the "modern" presidents - those of the World War II and post World War II generation - i.e., Franklin D. Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan.

It includes such nebulous attributes as personality/personal charisma, rhetoric of the president and the American people's perceptions of the president.

Public image has come to mean a media reflection - accurate and distorted - of the man as president and the institution of the presidency.

Broadly interpreted it is the popular view of the president and historically the folklore surrounding the presidents.

We included in this category student statements describing any foreign or domestic assessment of the president as portrayed in the printed and audio-visual media.

#8 Value to Country

Several students included their personal opinions regarding the president's worth/value to the country and/or to the world. Others wished that a designated president was currently in office. We viewed this as a category where students could discuss the significance, importance and/or the long-term value of a president to the country; it virtually excluded those presidents from Lyndon B. Johnson onward.

#9 Historical Perspective

We included in this category student statements revealing a more analytical interpretation of the presidents, historical events, comparisons of presidents, presidential policies as well as the long range implications of presidential action(s) and inaction(s). Again, it was more relevant to the earlier presidents excepting the "special nature" of the Nixon presidency - i.e., ". . . he didn't do anything any other president did not do except that he got caught."

#10 Sophistication

Several of the papers were well-written and demonstrated not only the students' factual knowledge concerning the presidents but also their ability to make comparisons between presidents and to evaluate and/or interpret the presidents' contributions to the nation and the world. We felt that these statements, often quite lengthy, needed a

separate category; some overlapping occurs between this category, value to country and history perspective.

#11 Factual Errors

We included in this category factual errors that the students made in areas such as dates, policies, events, order of the president, etc.

In evaluating papers concerning Richard Nixon's presidency, we divided this category into two parts: statements concerning his ending the Vietnam War and statements not dealing with his ending the Vietnam War.

Historical Spelling Words

In analyzing the students' paragraphs it would be impossible to ignore the numerous spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors. We kept a list of all the words the students misspelled, but not of the frequency of misspelling. In all, over 400 words were misspelled in the papers we analyzed. We were especially interested in those words we felt were historical terms, names of presidents, countries, wars, etc. Students misspelled approximately seventy-five of these "historical" terms. These are listed in alphabetical order, with the correct spelling listed first and the incorrect spelling(s) after the diagonal line and are included in the material we have given you.

affair/afair
Afghanistan/Afganistan, afganastin, Afganistam
assassinated/assasins, assasinatin, assignted, assassassainated, asassinated, assanated, assassanated, assinated
Begin/Bezein
believe/belive
bureaucratic/beauacray, beauraeracy
cabinet/cabinate
campaign/campain, campins
candidacy/canidacy
chief/cheif
colleagues/collegues
Communists/communist
competition/competion
condemning/condeming
confrontation/confrentation
controversy/controvery
country's/countries
charismatic/carismatic
crises/crisises, chisises
criticized/critized, critisized
decisions/desicions
Delano/Deleno
democrat/democrate
depression/deppression
diplomacy/deplimce
economics/econimans
Eisenhower/Eisinhower, Eiseneuhower
electors/electiers
enterprise/interprise
executive/exectutive
experience/experance
foreign/forgein, forigine, forgien
General McArthur/McAurthur
Gerald/Gereald
government/Goverment, goverment
governor/govene
helm/hem
incident/inceident
indecisive/indesive

interest/intrest
invasion/envasion
John Wilkes Booth/John Wilkesbooth
Johnson/Johnsen
Kennedy/Kenedy
legislation/legistration
liar/lyer
Libyans/Lybians
Lyndon/Lynden
missile/missle
Nixon/Nixion
numerous/numberous
opinion/opion, oppinion
opponent/apponent
opposed/oppossed
opposition/oposition
paranoid/pairinoid
policies/policys
presidency/presidensy, presidincy
president/presisent, presodent, presdent
quitting/quiting
Reagan/Ragon, Regan, Reagen, Reagon
rebels/rebles
represented/reprisented
responsible/restonible
Roosevelt/Rosevelt
scandal/scandel, scandle
scandalous/scandeles
situation/sitution
succeeded/suceeded
successor/succesor
troops/troups
Truman/Thurman
turmoil/termail
United States/United State
Vietnam/Viet-Nam, vietnam
Wallace/Wollus, Walius

In addition students did not capitalize the following proper names: Ford, Iran, Russia, Soviet Union, Watergate, and White House.

RICHARD M. NIXON

One hundred and four students chose Richard M. Nixon.

Thirty-nine students mentioned biographical details concerning Richard M. Nixon. The largest category of respondents, twelve, mentioned the resignation; eight mentioned Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford, and seven mentioned Ford's pardon of Nixon.

An example of comments in this category is: "The combination of Nixon's resignation and pardon by President Ford made people wonder if that arrangement hadn't been discussed before Ford was appointed."

Nine students mentioned Nixon's term of office and five mentioned the time period. An example of the comments is the following: "Richard Nixon was elected President in 1968. His running mate was Spiro Agnew, an unknown. One of his campaign promises was to get the United States out of Vietnam . . . . He was re-elected in 1972 for four more years. He was President for two more years only."

Five students mentioned Nixon's political career and four commented about his candidacy. Examples are as follows: "Richard Nixon was the Rep. candidate in 1960 against John F. Kennedy. He was defeated by Kennedy but not by a large margin;" and "Former President Nixon had a long career in politics. Being such an experienced politician he also knew many ways to reach a goal."

Three students mentioned other executive members of the Nixon Administration in the following manner: "Gerald Ford was his vice-president and Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State." Three students mentioned Nixon and his use of power. The following is an example: "Richard Nixon-as a man, and as a president he needed to fulfill a great thirst for power."

Three students commented directly and obliquely about Richard Nixon's psychological state and the consequences of his actions. An example is: "Richard Nixon was raised a very frustrated person which stayed with him throughout his years."

Three students also mentioned personal data that: his wife's name is Pat; his birthday is January 9; and he lived in San Clemente, California . . . . in semi-seclusion with his wife (1979). Another wrote, '. . . his personal life since his quiting office has been somewhat secluded, which is punishment enough for the termoil he led this nation into."

Twenty-four students made statements about Nixon's honesty or integrity. Eighteen students commented regarding his dishonesty. Their statements ranged from ". . . he was dishonest and sneaky" to "Nixon was a crook." They wrote such statements as: ". . . a man that had potential but used it in the wrong way;" "Richard Nixon was not a very good human being;" ". . . he wasn't totally honest;" "His accomplishments and deeds will always be overshadowed by his dishonesty . . . .;" ". . . he was dumb enough to get caught in all his dishonesty;" "The dishonesty totally shot down what our system is all about in the U.S.;" "But all along he was robbing everyone. bless his heart;" ". . . his actions were that of a criminal . . . .;" "His basic morals in the area of truefulness were far from good;" and "Richard Nixon the one everyone thought he was true blue President, found out that he was not and he found to be a lyer and everything else."

Six students wrote positive or negative statements concerning Nixon's integrity indicating their willingness to accept his rationale

for his actions. These students made the following statements: "He was a good man inside, but I believe the political system took him down;" "I believe that Richard Nixon wasn't such a bad person;" and "He covered up for his men which I consider more a quality of loyalty than criminality."

Fifty-seven students made statements about Nixon's leadership abilities. Forty-six of these statements were positive. Students used such phrases as: "one of the strongest presidents" (3 students); "handled job well;" "will be remembered favorably;" "one of the most efficient presidents;" "highly underrated" (2 students); "was a good president" (16 students); "one of the best (or excellent) presidents" (11 students); "stood out above all presidents;" "he did a great deal for this country" (4 students); "one of the most misunderstood presidents;" and "made several important contributions to the nation."

Students who wrote negative leadership statements said: "President Richard Nixon was the biggest disappointment to all America of any man I can think of;" "Richard Nixon was the worst president the USA had the Unpreledge of knowing, Because he totally screwed the country up and the left in the hands of a bumbling boob, that Nixon really knew what he was doing when he did that;" "President Nixon in my opion made a band name for the United States of America;" and "Nixon was a mistake."

Six students made statements concerning Nixon's intelligence. They made statements such as: "bugging the democratic office was a very stupid thing to do;" "Richard Nixon when in office was a very smart and shrewed politician;" "Nixon-He really was too smart for his own good. He knew what he had to be done and he knew how to do it;" and "I still feel he was extremely intelligent."

Fourteen students made statements about Nixon's domestic accomplishments such as: "He tried to keep Communism from spreading in the U.S.;" "During his time in office the country was stable, Unemployment was down, inflation was down, and most people in general were living well;" "I also agreed with his pro-business economic policies;" "In 1973, his wage and price controls were foreign to me and I had trouble understanding them, what good they would do. Possibly some good would have come had they been a blanket control, not one with loop holes for certain groups of mass producers . . . . I can remember no serious attempts to clean up the environment, however during his first office term, in keeping with national fascination, did try;" and "Our economy was certainly a lot better, our defense was probably the strongest in the world."

Sixty-four students wrote about Watergate.

Forty students commented directly concerning Watergate. The following are the descriptive adjectives and nouns used and their frequency: scandal (17); involvement (8); incident (6); issue (3); affair (2); and one each for bit, activity, situation and controversy. There is some confusion as to whether President Nixon resigned (9) or was impeached (5).

Regarding the actual activity or activities that Nixon was involved in twenty-one students commented on the following: wiretapping and/or bugging (10); Democratic headquarters and/or offices (4); interfering with the political campaign (2); tapes (3); bribery (1); and the Washington Post (1).

Eleven students made negative comments about Nixon's conduct and/or personal character: vindictiveness; damage; crook; ridiculed him;

mistrust of Nixon and government; and wrong.

Fourteen students made statements that were in the nature of an apology: "He made one mistake called Watergate;" "He covered up a few things but probably not anymore than some former presidents. He did many good things that outweigh anything bad that he did;" "I regret the Watergate incident because it tarnished his political abilities and prestige;" "Now we all know he was guilty of crimes in the Watergate scandal but this shouldn't be held against him;" "If not for Watergate he might have gone down as our greatest president;" "It is probably true that he was involved in Watergate, but the people of America don't know a lot of things that go on in Washington, this was just an incident that was brought out in the open;" "The only trouble was is that he got caught with the Watergate incident;" ". . . someone involved with him in Watergate had it in for him;" 'He was wrong about watergate but his policys were good;" and "He was a very unlucky President because he was one of the very many governmental people to get caught in a scandal. With the Watergate scandal he brought a lot of history to study."

Forty-six students made statements concerning Nixon's foreign accomplishments. Students gave overwhelming support to Nixon's foreign policies with forty-three students making positive statements, two making neutral statements and one making a negative statement.

Students making positive statements focused on four areas of foreign affairs: foreign diplomacy, the United States' relationship with China, ending the Vietnam War and the United States' relations with Russia.

In writing about Nixon's handling of diplomatic relations, students made statements such as: "Nixon was the best foreign policy president the

U.S. has ever had and that is what this country needs now;" "I feel that of the last five presidents Nixon had the best foreign policy, He wasn't as strong as Reagan but he was a better diplomat;" ". . . I think his foreign policies and combined efforts with Kissinger will later be recognized as helpful in our world standing." Twenty-two students referred to Nixon's establishment of diplomatic ties with China. They made statements such as: "He also opened up relations with China by visiting their country;" "He got us in good with China. Presidents like Carter and Reagen ruined these good foreign relations;" "It seems to me that if Nixon would not have done so well in Chinese relations, the east would be very much more unstable then the present. With China on the back door of Afganistan and so on that region of the world is a bit more stable;" and "He opened the door to China which may one day be our greatest alley against soviet aggression."

Nineteen students made statements dealing with Nixon's handling of the Vietnam War. They made statements such as: "Mr. Nixons greatest feat was the U.S. withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, without that fact we still might be fighting in that senceless war;" "He made many important contributions while in office most notably the Paris peace talks which ended the Vietnam War;" "Some people feel that he did poorly on the Vietnam situation, but he did as well as possible to try to keep pride in the United States in a war they could not win, a situation that he did not create;" "1973-74 escalation of the war, a futile attempt to end a winless war" (this is the only negative foreign accomplishment statement); "He finally managed after 15 years or so to withdraw U.S. military troops from Vietnam;" "One of his Campaign promises was to get

the United States out of Vietnam;" "Nixon got U.S. out of the Vietnam war, not by winning but by just pulling out for the sake of getting out" (this is one of the neutral statements about Nixon's foreign accomplishments); "he did work to free prisoners of war;" and "He tried to establish peace in Vietnam and his efforts to have them fight their own war were just."

Six students made statements concerning U.S. relations with Russia during the Nixon presidency. They made statements such as: "He was very strong and tactful in the issues abroad - such as V.N., the U.S.S.R., China;" "He also avoided confrontation with Russia by setting up arms agreements;" "He made many visits to many foreign countries, like Russia and China;" and "His efforts to stop the growth of communism are shown also in the bombing of Cambodia."

Nineteen students made statements about Nixon's public image. They made such positive statements as: "If he were to run again today I'd vote for him;" "I followed Richard Nixon the most, having arrived at a point when I cared about who was president of the United States at about the same time that he took office. He seemed to be a professional administrator and an old hand at Washington politics" (one other student refers to becoming interested in political issues at the time Nixon was in office); and "He was praised for his job in the oval office through out his first term and was re-elected in 72 by a landslide over Walus."

Two students made statements about the press's influence on Nixon: "He was persecuted by the press and his enemies;" and "I've read several books on the media's persecuting of Nixon, 'The Newstwisters';" and 'How C.B.S. tried to Kill a Book' and I believe that part of Nixon's Watergate blunder was because of his paranoia with the media. The polls

in the '72' election had him just a few percentage points ahead. Yet he won by one of the greatest landslides ever. I regret that he was unable to direct the country through his second term, but I don't agreee with some of the acts of his administration."

Five students made statements indicating that they feel that Nixon was misjudged: "Although he developed excellent foreign policies, the American people disliked him;" "A lot of Americans felt it was unfair for him to be pardoned;" "He did nothing worse than most presidents did before him, it's just that he got in the public spotlight. The American public blamed him for dirty dealings that went on in his administration, which more on the public's ignorance than on a president's ability." "The publicity given to this incident blew everything way out of proportion and resulted in a fine man losing appointed position;" and "The tapes that were discovered in his office reduced his credibility evem more in the eyes of the public."

Four students made negative statements about Nixon's public image: "The Watergate scandal probably did more damage to other countries opinions of the U.S. than anything in history;" ". . . obviously pairinoid that people were talking about him or doing him wrong . . . .;" "Richard alias Tricky Dicky . . .;" and "I remember everyone making political comics of his face."

Eleven students commented on President Nixon's value to the country. Five statements are as follows: ". . . his motives were for the best interest of our nation;" "Although he'll probably be best known for his mistakes, the good things he gave to our country far out do the mistakes;" "I feel the U.S. was a lot safer when he was President then

it has been since;" "The U.S. seems to be still effected by the scandle of Nixon;" and "I feel today we really need a president like Nixon."

One student wrote an analysis of President Nixon's value to the country as follows:

> I believe that Richard Nixon even though he caused a scandal in our government was a president who opened American's eyes. By being involved in Watergate along with all his other aides he showed Americans that we are not infalliable and that our government is not by any means perfect. He opened our eyes to the importance of choosing a good and honest president and he made a lot of people sit up and take notice to all aspects of politicians' lives. I feel that since Watergate, Americans are beginning to pay more attention to and want more information about their potential presidential candidates or any other politicians.

Students made fifty-five factual errors in writing about President Nixon. Of these, twenty students stated that Nixon ended the Vietnam War and/or brought the troops home from Vietnam. President Nixon received the entire credit for ending the war in Southeast Asia. Eleven students made errors relating to the date of his election, time in office or his tenure of office. Eight students believed that Nixon was impeached; one believed that he had had a trial.

Four students believed that he had lowered the inflation rate or solved the inflation problem with lower interest rates. Another student believed that he had guided the U.S. out of a recession. Two students believed that the U.S. began relations with China during his administration and two others wrote that Nixon and "all his aides" were involved in Watergate. Two students commenting on the JFK-Nixon election made errors. Fourteen students made miscellaneous errors.

Fifty-one students made statements that were classified as providing a historical perspective on Nixon's administration. All but

two of these statements dealt with Nixon's participation in the Watergate scandal.

Twenty-three students used the word "caught" to describe Nixon's involvement in Watergate. A sampling of their explanations for what happened to Nixon includes: "Richard Nixon was not a very good human being, All of his gains were made for himself, He used people and material for his own personal gains. There were probably a lot more like him but he was caught for his way of life. We as Americans should learn a lesson from this;" "What did this guy really do wrong . . . or right for that matter?! Most people are really misinformed as to what went on with President Nixon and his cohors . . . . He just had one little screw up and got caught;" "The president that really comes to mind for me is Nixon. I feel sorry for him and us that he was thrown out of office. In my opinion probably every canditatae in the past 50 years has some political espsionage and he was the one who was caught; Enough of that;" "Even though he wasn't totally honest, the other politicians weren't any better, and he was always trying to find out what they were doing. I think he was a good president because every thing he did, even though it was wrong, was in the best interest of the Public;" "Presidents are humans and we can not expect them to be Gods lacking in mistakes, Nixon just got caught!;" "He was criticized about cheating with taxes and stealing money and many cover ups. Well he's probably no more guilty than any other president in the past decade. I think he got a bum deal even though many would not agree.;" "I believe that the 'scandals' he was involved in, were highly typical of Presidents. He wasn't the only president to be involved in scandals, he was just one

of the unfortunate ones that got caught. I think that a little bit of scandal is necessary to have a successful office."

Four students indicated that Nixon's participation in the Watergate coverup led the American people to mistrust the government. Students made the following statements: "Then the Watergate scandel occured and people began to mistrust government- most of all, Nixon. Never had they heard of a president that was guilty of a crime. All Republicans were to blame & Nixon was a crook;" "He is criticized and made the scapegoat for the lack of faith the American people have in government;" and "He made all politicians look cheap and untrustworthy. He did make us all very aware of the humaness of the President of the U.S.A."

One student felt that the public cannot adequately assess Nixon's situation: "I feel he did nothing unusual or unjust in his efforts to carry out the responsibilities of his office. The 'average' citizen is not capable of evaluating the problems & responsibilities of such an office. Total honesty & public disclosure are rediculous expectations of a president - many necessary decisions - for the best interest of the nation - would obviously offend a majority of the unrealistic public."

Five students wrote statements about Nixon's concern with power or his place in history. They made the following statements: "Sure he usurped powers that were not his to take, but he got things done. Sometimes I think with all the government beauracracy and red tape it is the only way. I'd like to hear a little less criticism of Richard (Tricky Dick) Nixon;" "I can only feel that his zeal for power overwhelmed him and he lost his emotional balance. For him to have brought such disgrace to our nation is inexcusable;" "He had an obsessing with his

power but I think he did more good for this country than any president in the last thirty-five years he was not the first president to be involved in closed door misdealings;" and "This Inceident shows a few Things of his characteristics. His basic morals in the area of true-fulness were far from good. Which leeds to his feelings about his fellow man. He didn't care about anybody except Those in his way keeping him from the Top. And those people in his way he wanted to Eliminate. Maybe he wasn't To easy to do business with unless There was something in it for him."

Four students compared Nixon to other modern presidents. They made statements such as: "Many presidents have probably done more illegal things than he has in past years;" and "I'm sure he is not the only dishonest President in the history of the United States."

Eight students made value judgments about Nixon's place in history and his participation in Watergate. They made such statements as: "I think he was a good President because every thing he did, even though it was wrong, was in the best interest of the Public;" "I regret the Water-gate incident because it tarnished his political abilities and prestige;" and ". . . I believe we can not crucify a man for one wrong action. We must look at the good he did for the U.S. and judge for ourselves;" "He was very private as a president which led to many rumors. I honestly feel he could have done much good for the United States if he hadn't got messed up on scandals . . . His frustrations and temper caused many problems and it would seem if he'd kept himself under better control, especially with colleagues and the press, he'd have been much more successful in the eyes of the Public."

Three students made statements concerning the involvement of others in the Nixon administration in the Watergate scandal. They made such statements as: "Everyone makes a bad call, some are just a bit bigger than others. I feel he was not the only one to blame, In fact I feel many more people were to blame than were actually believed to have been. He had the final word, but, overall he was an excellent president while he was in office;" and "people seem only to remember him for attempting to cover up a stupid mistake that his underlines made."

JOHN F. KENNEDY

Fifty-two students chose John F. Kenned;

Thirty-six students commented about his background and personal history.

Twelve students commented that he was the youngest elected president, eight knew that he was the first Roman Catholic elected to the presidency and twenty-eight commented on his assassination and death. Eleven students located his election, administration or death in the correct time period. To a lesser extent, there were comments that: He had been a senator from Massachusetts; his Vice-President was Lyndon B. Johnson; he defeated Richard Nixon in the 1960 election; Lee Harvey Oswald shot John Kennedy and was subsequently killed by Jack Ruby; he was "one of several children of the Joseph P. Kennedy family who was involved in politics," he was shot in a motorcade in Dallas with the governor Connolly of Texas and he was a Democrat. Three mentioned Jacqueline Kennedy and their children, a son and a daughter. One mentioned his brother Robert and concluded that "Kennedy's name is a great political name which will probably help his brother along in politics."

The authors' nominee for the most confused paragraph is:

> President John F. Kenedy was assinated in June of 1961. His murderer was John Booth. President Kenedy was shot in the head and killed instantly. John Booth was chased into a barn and was shot in an attempt to capture him. Preident Kenedy was replaced by his Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Seven students made comments concerning President Kennedy's integrity. Two used the term "honest," one the term "noble," another "moral" and another "good." The comments included: "he had a way of making you feel that you could really trust what he said;" "he was going to help every people in all ways;" and "it was fortunate that he was a moral man, he could have been a dictator with his abilities."

Thirty-one students commented regarding Kennedy's leadership. They used such adjectives as: best (8); successful (3); greatest (3); outstanding (1); standout (1); favorite (1); great (1); very strong (2); strong (1); good (2); and better (2) in evaluating his ability and ranking among the presidents. Two mentioned the Cuban Missile Crisis and one his Berlin speech. Another concluded that, "Kennedy had a firm hand on America & started them to their uprise in world power." One student was negative in evaluation: "I would have to say Kennedy was the pres. that wasn't too high on my list of people. He was too Liberal and for the fact he was all for giving away free inter prizes."

Three students commented about his intelligence. One said, "he was handsome and smart." One student commented: "President John F. Kennedy-was the most smartest president in U.S. history."

Sixteen students commented about his domestic policies. There were eight comments concerning civil rights, five relative to the space program, one in regard to organizing the Peace Corps and one regarding,

"the power he developed in things as such as our Military." The comment, "his all out support of the space program was amusing," was the most ambiguous. All others were favorable, especially concerning the moon landing and his concern for the "poor and blacks."

Twenty-six made comments about Kennedy's foreign policies. There were nineteen comments about the Cuban Missile Crisis, six about the Bay of Pigs invasion, three about involving us in the Vietnam War, one relative to the Berlin speech and Berlin Wall and one commented that "he strengthened our ties with allies such as West Germany." The following comments summarize the evaluations: "Many people dislike Kennedy for his involvement in the Bay of Pigs fiasco" and "He started us into the long Vietnam War."

Nine students commented about Kennedy's courage. One mentioned specifically his "couage & valour displayed during W.W. II" and another "this man was not afraid to tell people what to do."

Twenty-five students commented about Kennedy's public image. The following comments are most pertinent: "He was loved and respected by the American public;" ". . . he had the ability to inspire and motivate . . . .;" "He encompassed young ideas and identified with the young people of our country: He had charisma;" "He spread love and understanding throughout the world and fought for human rights and dignity;" and "I remember he had a nice smile and a quick wit with reporters."

There were negative comments such as: "The only reason John F. Kennedy was a hero in the 60's was because of his assassination;" "although there are many scandals and much bad publicity about him," and, "many people respected him for his actions even though others criticized him."

Thirteen students wrote concerning Kennedy's value to the country. A few of their comments are: "Perhaps many events that have happened since then would have been different had he been our leader for several terms of office;" and "The carisma is important because it reduced the apathy toward government, and prompted the citizens to have pride in the country and to take an active part in the running of it." Another stated: "His assasination brought about a turning point and downfall in our government after losing him it seems like he was still around things would be different." Still another wrote, "I wish he was alive today to lead us again." One student commented: "His death occured when I was a young Kid and I always hear people say that they would like a president like him. People say that he did a lot for our country."

Twelve students made factual errors in their evaluation. Seven errors related to the time period, date of election, years in office, and date of assassination. One student believed that he was a hero of the Korean War. Others dealt with interpretation, i.e.: "He also made it possible for everyone to have equal income or equal wealth ('Share our wealth campaign')." Another stated, "his wife's name was Jackie O Kennedy."

Six students made statements indicating a sense of historical perspective. Two examples are: "Today there is still talk of the real Killer. Some people say the only thing great about Kennedy is his trip to Dallas;" and "Lyndon Johnson was blamed and hated by the American people because of Kennedy's foolish notions . . . . Kennedy started the Vietnam war By thinking it was Communists agaianst Christianity. It wasn't, it wasn't America's business to butt in. No one Knows that Kennedy started they always seem to frown on Johnsen."

Ten students commented with some degree of sophistication. Two quoted from his Inaugural Address, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Others stated that, "Kennedy did more for the American people in 3 years than President Nixon did in 8 years." "It is true that he did not get much legislation passed, but with Lyndon Johnson to help him with Congres . . . .;" "The economic reper-cuseions of this social generosity is just starting to be felt in the '80's. The governments attitude of helping all those in need was ideally sound but socially and econimically damaging;" and ". . . he Knew where he was going, and what he wanted to do with the country. He wanted the country to reunite and make the country strong again. Before he became president there was always a fear of a nuclear war with Russia, but he gave the country security.

HARRY S. TRUMAN

Of the twenty students who selected Harry S. Truman, nine made biographical statements indicating that he: was a Missouri politician; became president when Franklin Roosevelt died; was a high school graduate; dropped the atomic bomb on Japan; was elected in the 1948 landslide over Dewey; used "vulgar" language; was married to Bess; was known for his "toughness" and "brassness;" and was associated with the phrase "Give 'em hell, Harry."

Twelve students commented that Mr. Truman was an honest man and president by indicating that ". . . he preserved the quality and respect of the office of the president," and that ". . . people always knew where he stood on issues." An additional ambivalent comment considered as negative was the descriptive phrase that he was ". . . a man many people hated while in ofice."

Fifteen of the seventeen students commented favorably about his leadership indicating that he was a strong leader capable of making decisions at critical times.

Only two students, remarked specifically regarding Truman's intelligence stating that ". . . he knew what this weapon (atomic bomb) could do, and he knew the alternative" and ". . . he handled all of his responsibilities very well."

Few students, three only, mentioned any fact relating to Truman's domestic accomplishments and the most significant was his immigration policy.

Twelve students wrote concerning the decision to drop the atomic bombs on the Japanese viewing the decision as the "most important," and "hardest" decision of any modern day president. Three of the students evaluated the Truman decision thusly: "He demanded surrender from Japan. The Japanese did not respond, so that left him with no choice but to end the war quickly and without debate;" "I liked his tough guy foreign policy and the fact that he had the guts to drop the bomb on Japan proves to me that he believed in this country and would go to any extend to protect it;" and "The first thing I think of is he okayed the atomic massacre of Japanize citizens. Then I try and justify this to myself. On one hand he had a means to end the war by accepting the Japanize Surrender. Yet he chose to bring them to their knees to loose face. A fate as bad as death to the Japanize."

Other foreign policy statements related to ". . . increased U.S. involvement in Korea;" ". . . helped in the peace treaty and starting a

world wide Council of allies;" and that he was involved in the change from ". . . a war time economy to a peace time one."

Eleven students mentioned the president's courage usually relating this to his positive leadership and decision-making quality. Two students specifically remarked of his "courageous" behavior in the dismissal of General McArthur (sic).

Eight students again related Truman's decision-making ability to another aspect of the modern presidency, public image, by writing that: "He wasn't afraid of what people would think of certain decisions he made;" ". . . he seemed like any other American, not flashy, more like 'the man who lives next door';" and, ". . . he seemed to be a part of, and related best to the common working man."

Typical of the six students who commented concerning the president's value to the country are these statements: "After he left office people all started to look back and were pretty impressed with the backbone . . . .;" "Truman had all the making of a president and we need someone like him today;" and, "Although Truman started the support of the Southeast Asia countries, which would increase with the next Four presidents, i believe history will & does show that he made the correct deceision at that time."

Five students made factual errors. One apparently believed that Truman was a "Habidasher" immediately before he served his presidential term. Another believed that Truman ". . . put American on a sound economic base after the depression" while still another stated that ". . . he had no choice on entering the U.S. into WWII."

Four students wrote more sophisticated statements regarding Truman's presidential tenure. The two categories are statements concerning

Truman personally and about the decision to drop the bomb. An example of each respective category includes the following: "While he didn't always agree with Roosevelt's 'new dea' -- his administration was responsible for carrying out some of those policies;" and relative to the use of the atomic bomb, "This event changed the lives of everyone in the world. Up to this time warfare had not been so all encompassing--now a nation had the potential of killing off entire cities, Small countries, etc with one bomb."

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Sixteen students chose Theodore Roosevelt.

Five students made the following statements about Theodore Roosevelt's background: he became president as a result of the assassination of McKinley at the turn of the century; he was born in New York City; he was sickly as a child and as a result became very athletic as an adult to overcome this; his family was wealthy; he started his own party when the Republican Party did not nominate him; and the teddy bear is named after him.

Five of the six students who wrote about Roosevelt's leadership believed that he was a strong and forceful president. They wrote statements such as: "Teddy Roosevelt was probably the backbone of the United States. He was ever president should be like. He knew how to handle world problems. Roosevelt showed the world that the United States was strong and powerful in its actions . . . .;" and "I feel Theodore Roosevelt was the best president since 1865." One student indicated dissent without explanation: "Roosevelt is considered by many to be one of America's greatest presidents. I however do not agree entirely with this statement."

Only one student wrote about Roosevelt's intelligence. He stated: "Also from a military standpoint he was nobody's fool."

Nine students mentioned Roosevelt's domestic accomplishments including: labor and business reforms; labor laws shortening the work day and week; laws improving safety and working conditions; efforts in controlling monopolies; beginning the National Park system; and being a conservationist.

Six students mentioned Roosevelt's foreign accomplishments including: fighting the Spanish American War; building and funding the Panama Canal; and his "Speak softly and carry a big stick" policy.

Four students made the following statements concerning Roosevelt's public image: "His image an 'American hero' becomes more evident each time his presidency is studied;" "President Roosevelt was a rugged individual however he ran the nation in the same rugged manner;" and "He was one of the most outspoken presidents up to that time . . . Teddy Roosevelt was a 'work-a-holic'. He was outgoing, as well as outspoken."

Three students made statements concerning Roosevelt's value to the country. One student stated that ". . . he was a very productive president." The second student wrote: "Many times Roosevelt acted in an imperialistic and militaristic manner. This has over the years caused much tension between the United States and Latin American relations. In this sense I do not consider Roosevelt one of the greatest presidents." The third student felt that Roosevelt's long lasting contribution was in the area of ". . . Recreation and Physical Education . . . ."

There were seven factual errors such as: "Theodore Roosevelt was born in N. Y. sometime in the early 1800's;" "Some social reforms were old-age pensions, education . . .;" "Among his activities were being a one time Texas Ranger;" "Yellowstone National Park being the first national park in the United States;" and "Roosevelt did not want Cuba to go communist . . . ." Two students wrote that Theodore Roosevelt started the New Deal and got the U.S. out of the depression.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize our data, the authors reached the following conclusions regarding student evaluations of Presidents Nixon, Kennedy, Truman and Theodore Roosevelt.

First, regarding Richard M. Nixon, Watergate overshadows all else in his presidency. The majority evaluation was that President Nixon "did not do anything that any other president did not do, only he got caught." A significant number of students were confused about the manner in which he left the presidency; about an equal number believed that he had been impeached to those who thought he had resigned. Nixon's overwhelming achievements were in foreign affairs--specifically, American-Chinese relations and United States withdrawal from Vietnam. Students stated categorically that Nixon "ended the Vietnam War" although the Fall of Saigon did not occur until 1975. Students also believe that Nixon's foreign policy achievements will ultimately overshadow his participation in the Watergate scandal and that historians will finally judge him as a great president.

Second, regarding John F. Kennedy, the majority of students viewed him as an American hero. Students had accurate biographical details and

believed him an outstanding leader. Their perception of the assassinated president can be encapsulated in the word charisma. He is a media figure of the first rank and he inspired confidence in himself, his policies and his administration. In domestic policy students credit him with an active concern for civil rights while the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Vietnam intervention are his most significant foreign policies.

Third, regarding Harry S. Truman, students mentioned most frequently his honesty and decision-making, especially in dropping the atomic bomb(s) on Japan in World War II.

Fourth, regarding Theodore Roosevelt, he is most similar to President Kennedy in student perceptions being viewed as an American hero for his participation in the Spanish-American War and his public image. Students believed he was a forceful leader in foreign and domestic affairs. They remember him for the Panama Canal and for his achievements in conservation.

Finally, the authors concur that if they were to grade these papers on the quality of written English, as a whole the papers would receive a grade of C- to D+. In regard to the quality of the historical content of the papers, the median would be a full grade higher; in the B- to C+ range. This project thus corroborates what the various commissions on education have been stating that current American students are not being adequately taught to communicate in written English.

TERM_____

PRESIDENT:_____

#_____:_____

PRESIDENT:_____

SEMESTER:_____

NUMBER SELECTION PRESIDENT:_____

WOMEN:_____

MEN:_____

#1)BIOGRAPHY/BACKGROUND:_____

#2)INTEGRITY:

POSITIVE:_____

NEGATIVE:_____

#3)LEADERSHIP:

POSITIVE:_____

NEGATIVE:_____

#4)INTELLIGENCE:_____

#5)ACCOMPLISHMENTS/POLICIES:

DOMESTIC(NON-WATERGATE):_____

DOMESTIC (WATERGATE):_____

FOREIGN:_____

#6) COURAGE:_____

#7PUBLIC IMAGE:_____

#8)VALUE TO COUNTRY:_____

#11) FACTUAL ERROR:_____

VIETNAM WAR:_____

#12) HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE/ SOPHISTICATION: _____